

**CLAIMS:**

What is claimed is:

- 5     1.     A method, in a data processing system, of outputting a communication from a single source to a plurality of recipient devices, comprising:
- transmitting the communication to the plurality of recipient devices such that the communication is received by the plurality of recipient devices but is output by only a first subset of the plurality of recipient devices, wherein the first subset is less than all of
- 10    the plurality of recipient devices;
- receiving responses from at least some of the first subset of the plurality of recipient devices;
- determining if a predetermined response requirement is met by the responses received from the at least some of the first subset of the plurality of recipient devices; and
- 15    outputting the communication on a second subset of the plurality of recipient devices if the predetermined response requirement has not been met by the responses received from the at least some of the first subset of the plurality of recipient devices.
2.     The method of claim 1, wherein transmitting the communication to the plurality
- 20    of recipient devices includes assigning a probability to the communication, and wherein each of the plurality of recipient devices determines whether to output the communication based on the probability assigned to the communication.
3.     The method of claim 1, wherein outputting the communication on a second subset
- 25    of the plurality of recipient devices includes retransmitting the communication to the

plurality of recipient devices such that the second subset of the plurality of recipient devices outputs the communication.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein transmitting the communication to the plurality  
5 of recipient devices includes assigning a probability to the communication and each of the plurality of recipient devices determines whether to output the communication based on the probability assigned to the communication, and wherein retransmitting the communication to the plurality of recipient devices includes retransmitting the communication with a different probability than the probability that was assigned to the  
10 communication.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is one of an instant message and an electronic mail message.

15 6. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication is one of a PollCast and a SkillTap message.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein outputting the communication on a second subset of the plurality of recipient devices includes, within each recipient device:  
20 storing the communication in a storage;  
determining if a predetermined amount of time has elapsed since a previous determination whether to output the communication has been made;  
determining whether to output the communication based on output criteria; and  
outputting the communication if the output criteria is satisfied.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein transmitting the communication to the plurality of recipient devices includes comparing, for each recipient device in the plurality of recipient devices, a bit mask to identifiers of the recipient devices, wherein the first subset of the plurality of recipient devices includes recipient devices that are determined to be  
5 recipient devices that are to output the communication based on the comparison of the bit mask to the identifiers of the recipient devices.
9. The method of claim 8, wherein outputting the communication on a second subset of the plurality of recipient devices includes:  
10       shifting the bit mask; and  
          comparing the shifted bit mask to the identifiers of the recipient devices to identify the second subset of the plurality of recipient devices.
10. The method of claim 2, wherein each of the plurality of recipient devices  
15 determines whether to output the communication based on the probability by generating a randomized value and comparing the randomized value to the probability to determine whether to output the communication.
11. A system for outputting a communication from a single source to a plurality of  
20 recipient devices, comprising:  
          at least one network;  
          a communications server coupled to the at least one network; and  
          a plurality of recipient devices coupled to the at least one network, wherein the communications server transmits the communication to the plurality of recipient devices  
25 such that the communication is received by the plurality of recipient devices but is output by only a first subset of the plurality of recipient devices, wherein the first subset is less

than all of the plurality of recipient devices, receives responses from at least some of the first subset of the plurality of recipient devices, determines if a predetermined response requirement is met by the responses received from the at least some of the first subset of the plurality of recipient devices, and wherein, if the predetermined response requirement  
5 has not been met by the responses received from the at least some of the first subset of the plurality of recipient devices, the communication is output on a second subset of the plurality of recipient devices.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the communications server assigns a probability  
10 to the communication, and wherein each of the plurality of recipient devices determines whether to output the communication based on the probability assigned to the communication.

13. The system of claim 11, wherein the communication is output on a second subset  
15 of the plurality of recipient devices by retransmitting the communication to the plurality of recipient devices such that the second subset of the plurality of recipient devices outputs the communication.

14. The system of claim 13, wherein the communications server assigns a first  
20 probability to the communication and each of the plurality of recipient devices determines whether to output the communication based on the first probability assigned to the communication, and wherein the communications server assigns a second probability different from the first probability prior to retransmitting the communication to the plurality of recipient devices.

15. The system of claim 11, wherein the communication is one of an instant message and an electronic mail message.
16. The system of claim 11, wherein the communication is one of a PollCast and a SkillTap message.
17. The system of claim 11, wherein each recipient device stores the communication in a temporary storage, determines if a predetermined amount of time has elapsed since a previous determination whether to output the communication has been made, determines whether to output the communication based on output criteria, and outputs the communication if the output criteria is satisfied.
18. The system of claim 11, wherein each recipient device compares a bit mask to an identifier of the recipient device, wherein the first subset of the plurality of recipient devices includes recipient devices that are determined to be recipient devices that are to output the communication based on the comparison of the bit mask to the identifiers of the recipient devices.
19. The system of claim 18, wherein the recipient devices shift the bit mask and compare the shifted bit mask to the identifiers of the recipient devices to identify the second subset of the plurality of recipient devices.
20. A method of distributing messages to a plurality of client devices in a network, comprising:
- receiving a message for broadcast to a plurality of client devices;
- assigning a probability value to the message;

transmitting the message to the plurality of client devices;  
at each client device, generating a randomized value;  
comparing the randomized value of a client device to the probability value of the  
message; and

- 5            outputting the message based on the comparison of randomized value and the  
probability value.